DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE INTEGRATION PATHS 4 MIGRANT WOMEN

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Comparative Report

Investigating practices, gaps & needs for TCN women and Labour Market Stakeholders in partner countries

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AMIF ENGAGE: Aims & Purposes

The project Development of inclusivE iNteGration pAths 4 miGrant women / ENGAGE aimes to increase TCN women's capability for entering the labour market and social life of the host society. The above will be achieved via the organization of Up- Skilling workshops, Job Shadowing Programme and Cross-cultural activities. The direct and indirect target groups are TCN women, LMS, TCNs and local citizens (women and men), professionals, policy makers, NGOs and the general public.

TCN women, which are representing the 45% of refugees in the EU, have lower activity and employment rates, a higher risk of poverty and are more likely to be in lower skilled occupations. Most of them face particular integration challenges associated with lower education and labour market outcomes compared to refugee men. A main reason is that they are coming from countries with high gender inequality and low employment rates for women. Therefore, an effective integration process of these women in the new social environment, can contribute to their social and economic inclusion.

Although the integration issue is at the heart of the political discussion in Europe, many countries face difficulties in absorbing a greater number of migrants, as well as in the latter's willingness to integrate. Much has been said and written on migration and integration, but too little attention, however, has been paid to women. While TCN women are highly qualified, most of them are directed to jobs and training mostly for household, care sector, secretary, and back-office services, unsuitable to their qualifications. Across the EU and specifically in Southern Europe, over 30% of TCN women work in low-skilled jobs, although they have tertiary degrees.

As a direct response to these facts, the project aims to organise targeted workshops for TCN women and Labour Market Representatives and serves a dual aim:

1. to support TCN women's first steps in the host community's labour market through the acquisition of employability skills

2. to increase LMS' awareness on TCN women's specific needs and gender issues

3. to introduce Job Shadowing as an efficient integration measure

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COMPARATIVE REPORT: Investigating practices, gaps & needs

The aim of this report is to investigate the current scene in partner countries in relation to the integration practices and to identify good practices and gaps for the development of new innovative ways to attract migrant women. Though there is evidence in existing practices and policies for TCN women's integration, the project consortium has organized 2 focus groups from each partner country with local key players such as representatives from NGOs, labour market, local authorities and the target group, TCN women, in order to collect valuable information about attitudes and perceptions. The data collected, which will indicate the vulnerability of TCN women in specific topics, will be highly useful for the development of the consortium's targeted approach towards TCN women. Mapping and analysis of needs, gaps, good practices and policies in partner countries, is of great importance, as they will be used as the basis for the design of complementary and tailored integration tools. The proposed activities aim to provide useful information for the hosting country, such as introduction to social and cultural aspects, labour market policies and the delivery of an Employability Skills targeted training.

The first part of this report describes the situation of TCN women at a European level. Next, it investigates how policy and legislation and support services in partner countries are directed at the integration of these women, followed by a brief discussion of their situation on the labour market. The findings from the focus groups with women as well as labour market stakeholders will give more insight into the barriers women and companies face for integration in the labour market. An overview of needs and gaps on both sides will allow us to provide an overview of possible solutions and recommendations that can be implemented in the development of the ENGAGE programme activities.

This final comparative report was developed by UCLL. The following is a list of the partner countries and organisations that contributed to the national research reports, of which this report is a comparative synthesis:

Organisation	Country	Status
UCLL	Belgium	University college
ZRC SAZU	Switzerland	NGO
InterAktion	Austria	NGO
Dimitra	Greece	VET Centre
Emphasys	Cyprus	Education, ICT and Research Training Centre
AdamMob	The Netherlands	NGO
CYRC	Cyprus	Refugee Council
CeFAS	Italy	Training Centre
KITEV	Germany	NGO
Dramblys	Spain	NGO

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DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGET GROUP

In Europe, migrant women slightly outnumber migrant men, and the group is growing. Women migrate for various reasons. They are less likely to arrive through the asylum channel and more likely to arrive as family migrants of resettled refugees or men who migrate for work. They might migrate as specialized employees or as unskilled labour migrants. Women might also be forced to migrate following conflict or forms of persecution such as gender-based violence. In terms of education, female refugees have lower education levels than any other migrant group, as well as compared to the native population. [1]

Migrant women, or third country national (TCN) women are at the intersection of three axes of identity: gender, ethnicity or religion, socio-economic or legal status. In the labour market, TCN women can experience discrimination and barriers at all three axes. This is clearly reflected in the level of employment of this specific group when compared to other groups that share one or two identity axes: the level of employment of low-educated migrant women is lower than that of low-educated migrant men, high-educated migrant women, and low-educated native women. Hence, low-educated TCN women experience barriers for entering the labour market at all three axes of their identity. An integrated programme targeted at supporting these women should therefore take into account all levels of their complex situation.

Low-educated TCN women are not only vulnerable in terms of entering the labour market. When they are employed, they often can be found in low-wage, informal or precarious employment contracts, where they have limited rights and few prospects for the future.

This situation at a European level can also be found in the experiences of the focus groups that were conducted in all partner countries with TCN women and Labour Market Stakeholders. The findings of the focus groups will be compared and discussed further on in the report. The report furthermore reviews the situation of national policies on integration and gender equality, support services for TCN women, as well as best practices for social and labour market integration. An analysis of gaps and needs for this specific target group in terms of integration will lead to recommendations for the implementation of the project's objectives. This report provides a comparative overview of policies, needs and recommendations for all partner countries involved. For country-specific details, the national reports for each partner country can be consulted on the project website.

[1] Eurodiaconia, 2018. Eurodiaconia's Guidelines for the Integration of Migrant Women. Brussels. Retrieved from: https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Eurodiaconia_Guidelines_Integration_Migrant_Women_WEB.pdf

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CURRENT SITUATION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

Policy and legislation

In all partner countries, there is an integration policy in place to facilitate the integration of refugees and newcomers. In most countries, this entails free or easy to access language courses and social integration courses. In some countries, such as Austria and Belgium, integration also includes professional counselling and social integration through participation in society. Such an integration track provided by the government might even be mandatory, as it is in Germany. These services are either offered by the state, or by NGOs or civil society organisations under the impulse of the state. For the organisation of these courses, a strong collaboration between the national policy and local government and local civil society is indispensable. The implementation of successful integration policies hence relies on the engagement of the local civil society.

For most EU countries, gender equality is embedded in the national law. However, this policy often doesn't take into account the specific discrimination that TCN women face on the basis of their religion. For example, a hijab ban in the workplace is a factor that affects many migrant women's access to the labour market. However, this never is a specific part of a gender equality policy for the labour market in participating countries. Gender equality policies already in place often fail due to cultural stereotypes and lack of awareness with policy makers.

Hence, even if most countries clearly have an integration policy and a gender equality policy, it often is not specifically tailored to the needs of TCN women. Moreover, this policy is often not linked to labour market integration policies. There is a need of a unified policy that addresses all aspects of this complex problem and multi-layered form of discrimination.

Support services

In general, TCN women can benefit from the same financial, legal and social support services that native-born women can benefit from, at least if they have a residence permit. In most countries however, these support services also depend on someone's availability for the labour market. In Belgium for example, a person needs to be actively looking for a job in order to receive financial support from the state. In the case of TCN women, who often need to take up family and childcare, it means they often are unemployed and inactive in the labour market, and thus they have limited access to social security or social benefits. Moreover, due to lack of opportunities, many TCN women are pushed into the underground labour market and unregistered jobs, which further weakens their right to social security.

Having the right to these support services, doesn't mean that everyone claims this right. Proportionally, TCN women make less use of these services than do native-born women. This might be an indication that they are less familiar with legislation and opportunities, or that they have less access to them. For example in Belgium, TCN women have less access to childcare than do high-educated native women, because access to this support service is arranged in such a way that it mainly benefits native-born, high-educated women

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(e.g. importance of personal network, standard opening hours, access to information, selection procedures, …).

In several countries, there are good examples of best practices and initiatives targeted specifically at newcomers and even at migrant women. However, these are heavily dependent on temporary funding, local authorities and volunteers, and hence do not offer the continuity these women need for long-term support.

Labour Market Integration

In all partner countries, it is clear that TCN women form one of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market. The unemployment rate with TCN women is often almost twice as high as with national citizens. The women are either inactive, confronted with a lack of opportunities due to high standards and/or discrimination, or are in precarious conditions because of illegal or unregistered work. TCN women often take up domestic work which is not recognised formally as work experience.

A2 or in some cases B1 level of language is often required for entering the labour market, at least in the public sector. The private sector does not apply a minimum of language, but often has high standards for the local language or English language. Next to that, most sectors require specific professional experience or additional training.

Currently there are no specific job shadowing schemes for migrant women. In some countries there are job shadowing or mentoring schemes directed at newcomers, but these are mainly aimed at higher-educated migrants and do not have a gender-sensitive approach.

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FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Profile of participants

The group of women participating in the focus groups is very heterogenous in background and in family situation. They are single, married or divorced, with or without children, high and low-educated with little to no work experience in their host country. The majority of them migrated from a Middle-Eastern country or the African continent, the majority of them are Muslim or Black. They migrated to their host country for various reasons: to find a job, to seek refuge from war or conflict, to join their husbands or families. They all share a low proficiency in the local language. Some of the women also speak English or French.

Labour Market Stakeholders participating in the focus groups were from the social and public sector with extensive experience in providing services to TCN women. Their clients are mostly informed about their services through the government and other organisations in local civil society. Hence, collaboration between the federal and local policy or initiatives is crucial in informing TCN women in the possibilities for integration and counselling. The majority of participating stakeholders indicate that they assess women's needs through a continuous and collaborative process, with an interview or intake conversation, through (self-)observation, a portfolio, …

Experience with training

Most women participating went through some kind of integration path, with language courses, social integration courses and/or professional training. Experience with this training was very diverse. In some focus groups, the women were satisfied with the services offered to them. In other focus groups, they were disillusioned because there was no continuity after the training. This left them with a feeling that they put a lot of effort and time in it, but were left empty-handed. They were not encouraged to participate in any future trainings again.

Social integration

In each country there are several local NGOs that offer activities or buddy projects aimed at social participation of newcomers, some of which targeted specifically at women. These activities foster empowerment and a local network for the women participating in them. The most successful initiatives were those which only involved women or which were aimed at mothers and even their children. However, the majority of women feel it is very difficult to integrate because locals are not very open to new people or other cultures. It takes too much effort on their part to integrate, and they feel that the local community is not very welcoming or aware of their efforts. Some of the women expressed the need for awareness raising activities with the local community as well.

Barriers for labour market integration

All women participating in the target groups have experienced some form of discrimination which has hindered their labour market integration. Either there is a general policy that is not very inclusive, such as

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sectors or companies that don't hire women with clear characteristics that give away their ethnicity or religion (e.g. hijab, skin colour), or employers are outright racist. In all focus groups, women indicate that access to the labour market is difficult to very difficult for them.

The women in the focus groups mainly indicated to experience the following barriers for accessing the labour market:

- discrimination, systemic racism, prejudice
- limited knowledge of the local language
- no work experience in the host country
- working hours that are incompatible with child and family care
- lack of (public) transport
- trainings that are not tailored to their specific needs

Participants in the focus groups indicated they believe TCN women experience the following barriers in accessing the labour market:

- lack of awareness with employers about the need to employ these women, and about TCN women's specific situation and needs
- prejudice about the skills and culture of the women
- complicated procedures to hire refugees or newcomers
- employers or companies only seeing challenges in hiring these women and not the potential they might have for the company
- lack of a clear policy on the validation of formal and informal skills and qualifications (this is especially important because women often gain experience and knowledge through care and informal situations)
- high requirements for language and skills and little room for flexibility on the part of employers

Needs for labour market integration

Women in the focus groups expressed the need for the following skills at a personal level:

- Language proficiency: this was the first thing to be stressed by all participants in the focus groups. An integrated programme should also offer the possibility for formal or informal language learning.
- Digital skills required for the modern workplace
- Soft skills: team work, communication, self-initiative
- Networking with employers and companies
- Knowledge about rights, legislation, unions, organisations, …
- Financial competences
- Interaction with locals and expanding their personal network

However, integration in the labour market is a two-way street, and on the part of employees and policy, they indicated the following needs:

- Employers and companies that are open-minded and unprejudiced
- Awareness with the local community
- Opportunities
- Accessible and affordable childcare
- Flexible working hours

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Labour market stakeholders stressed the need of cultural awareness with employers and professionals, so as to avoid cultural stereotypes and a lack of adjusted hiring policies. The following aspects should be integrated in training for labour market stakeholders:

- Empathy
- Awareness
- Intersectionality
- Collaboration with professionals in the social sector
- Intercultural understanding
- Focus on the potential and the recognition of informal skills, instead of only focusing on past experience or formal qualifications
- More confidence in these women's skills

Participants in focus groups acknowledged that job shadowing schemes would be very useful and encouraging for the target group.

Recommendations

Next to recommendations for labour market integration, the focus groups also rendered some general advice on working with the target group and working towards a more general integration.

General recommendations:

- Include women in decision making
- Raise awareness with the local community too, not only with labour market stakeholders
- A stronger cooperation between public and private sector
- The role of civil society and local organisations in providing services is crucial
- A stronger collaboration with local authorities and employment agencies
- Integration into existing initiatives and long-term programmes will benefit the sustainability of the project's activities.

Recommendations in dealing with the target group:

- Acknowledge the women as experts of their own lives
- Always consider their background and family situation
- Apply an outreaching approach
- Organise activities and programmes in a flexible way so that they are adapted to the women's needs

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CONCLUSION

TCN women are one of the most vulnerable groups to enter the labour market. When they are inactive or absent, they are hard to reach because of language barriers, cultural norms or inadequate activation policies that do not take into account the specific situation of these women. When they are active in the labour market, they are hindered by multiple barriers: discrimination, lack of language skills, family obligations and unfavourable labour market conditions that push them towards low-wage or informal sectors.

To involve these women in the labour market, an outreaching and integrated policy at all levels is necessary. One that takes into account the multi-layered identity of these women: their gender, their ethnicity or religion, and their socio-economic or legal status. Too often, integration initiatives or introductory programmes are not tailored to their specific needs, which leads them to be discouraged about taking any training again.

Some of the key recommendations for the integration of TCN women in the labour market are:

- provide opportunities for language learning, formal and/or informal
- ensure cultural competency with labour market stakeholders; reduce the possibility of cultural stereotypes and lack of knowledge
- be aware about the availability to, or barriers for access to services: provide information in various languages, adapt programmes to the responsibilities of childcare or family care, adapt programmes to the availability of public transport. Be outreaching in the community, by involving volunteers or role models from the community.
- support the validation and recognition of qualifications and informal skills
- support the creation of professional and social networks
- ensure a policy and approach that is both gender and culture sensitive

There is a clear need of long-term initiative that are not dependent on short-term funding or don't provide any continuity. Activities should be integrated in existing initiatives or organisations, so that continuity and long-term support are guaranteed. These programmes are most successful when they are target at women, mothers and possibly their children as well. During the whole project, there should be a constant check-in with the target groups needs, so as to constantly provide them with the flexibility and support they need to successfully participate in trainings and the labour market.

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